

A Guide to Writing for COM546

Goals of Writing Assignments:

- gain more knowledge about a particular field that interests you
- report on research findings
- synthesize different positions and evaluate which position has the greatest internal consistency
- develop support for your own position
- apply an intellectual framework to a new problem
- use theoretical criteria discussed in class in an analytical framework
- extrapolate from ideas developed in readings and in class to suggest what might happen in the future or how a past event might have changed had economic conditions differed

Journal (Blog) Writing:

Research shows that writing improves thinking (analytical) skills. It forces us to practice a skill that may have gotten rusty, because most of the time, our thinking remains isolated in our own minds. Reflection, in these hectic, “down-sized” days, is a luxury that we often postpone, sometimes indefinitely. Thus the request to blog: to reflect, then to put our thoughts on digital paper. The act of writing helps us evaluate our beliefs and assumptions and also helps cement knowledge.

The journal writing does not need to be – should not be – thought of as a “paper.” Please don’t just summarize the content of a reading. Instead, journal writing should demonstrate that you have thought about the readings and your experiences. How did the readings relate to other readings in this or another course? How did the readings relate to your experience? Did you enjoy the readings? What were your insights, criticisms, comments, questions?

The journal entries are not given a letter grade. Instead, the act of journaling (does the writing demonstrate that you completed the assignment and was it submitted on time) is what is “graded.” Each student is allowed to miss one week without demerit; completing the assignment every week yields an extra credit score.

The additional component of peer comment lets us help one another clarify understanding – whether the comments are supportive or critical of our assumptions. In all cases, however, the comments should reflect respect for the other person and for those ideas that differ from our own. As with the journals themselves, each student is allowed to miss one week of commenting without demerit.

The Three-Linked Papers:

Our class is composed of individuals with very divergent interests – from usability to streaming media, from online journalism to documentaries. The three linked papers – a more traditional academic form of writing – are designed for you to explore an area of interest to you, to expand your expertise, or to honor your intellectual curiosity. In addition, this assignment helps you develop your skills in identifying and evaluating information from a diverse set of sources, both academic and popular.

The suggested process follows:

- brainstorm ideas
- identify source materials
- refine the topic
- draft
- revise
- refine introduction, conclusion
- cite sources

Brainstorming: Brainstorming begins in the first classroom session, with the first peer group meeting. It continues in class as well as out-of-class using the Catalyst peer group tool.

Identify Source Materials: Jessica Albano, the communications resource librarian, provides a workshop the first classroom session and is available via e-mail or face-to-face to help students identify sources appropriate to their topics. I am also a resource, although on some subjects Jessica may be more familiar with source options.

Refine the Topic: After formal feedback from peer group members and the instructor using the Catalyst tool, students refine their topic and present a proposal to the instructor using Catalyst eSubmit.

Draft Project Proposal – Suggested Content (due Friday 15 October at 6 pm via Peer Review)

- State the research area you have selected.
- Explain why you're interested in this research area.
- Try to be as succinct and as focused as possible.
- Peers and the instructor will provide constructive feedback over the course of the next few days. The task usually takes the form of helping one another refine (narrow) the topic so that the work involved can be accomplished over the course of the quarter. Sometimes the task is to broaden the topic so that it will be possible to find academic resources on the subject.

Final Project Proposal – Suggested Content (due Friday 22 October at 6 pm via eSubmit)

- State the research area you have selected.
- Explain why this is an important topic to research.
- Explain how you visualize breaking your topic into three linked papers.
- Provide an **annotated** list of resources you have found that are related to your topic. By locating resources at this stage of your research, you help assure yourself that there is a body of research on your chosen topic. Remember that the final project must have 15 scholarly sources.
- The proposal is not graded. It is reviewed and noted as complete. Grade is completed/not completed.

Draft – Revise – Refine: These are classic steps in writing any document. The instructor is willing to review document drafts so long as they are submitted at least a week prior to the final paper due date. The earlier, the better, for all concerned!

There are reference materials on writing papers on hold for this class in the undergraduate library (see eReserve for details). I have reference materials in my personal library that may be borrowed for a week. Also, the University has helpful resources:

- Student Athletes writing center documents:
<http://depts.washington.edu/saas/academics/writingcenter/>
- UW Writing Centers: <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwholmes/uwwrite.html>

There are also helpful online resources:

- How to Search the Invisible Web: <http://tinyurl.com/dpqdy>
- Purdue's Online Writing Center:
 - Creating a Thesis Statement: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01>
 - Developing an Outline: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/01>
 - Writing a Research Paper:
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/>
- The Seven Deadly Sins of Bad Writing: <http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/resource/wc/sins/>
- The Writing Process: <http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/style/process.html>

Sources: Because the Chicago Manual of Style is often used in the business world, this is the recommended style guide for this course. However, students who are familiar with APA style or who wish to use a more “academic” method of citation are welcome to format citations in this manner. Online resources include:

- APA
 - APA Style: <http://www.apastyle.org/>
 - Purdue's OWL: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apa.html
 - The Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison:
<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocAPA.html>
- Chicago
 - Search the Chicago Manual of Style (requires free registration):
<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/search.html>
 - University Libraries, Ohio State University:
<http://library.osu.edu/sites/guides/chicagogd.html>
 - The Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison:
<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html>
- Citing electronic sources (in general)
 - Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/start/cite/index.html>
 - A Reference Guide to Online Sources:
<http://www.bedfordmartins.com/online/citex.html>
- Other
 - Duke University Comparative Citations by Citation Type (book, journal, web page, etc): http://www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/cite/works_cited.htm
 - Footnoted, comparative citations and links to style guide PDFs:
<http://footnoted.net/>
 - UW Library's source matrix:
<http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/communications/bi/periodicals.html>
 - Using Sources: <http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/resource/wc/usingsources.html>

Elements of a Good Project Proposal

Writing a good proposal will help you manage your time so that you can complete the quarter with three papers that meet your objectives. The specific format and content of these elements may vary; they may not always appear as separate sections or in the order listed here.

Introduction

This is a clear and concise statement of the purpose or goal of the project. Consider including (1) the specific question(s) to be answered (what) and (2) a brief explanation of the need for or significance of the study (why). The introduction should also address your objectives – what you intend to accomplish this quarter.

Literature Review

This section need not be lengthy but it should reflect your understanding of relevant bodies of literature. List all pertinent papers or reports that you have consulted in preparing the proposal; include conversations with faculty, peers or other experts. A well-written review provides a sense of critical issues which form the background for your own work this quarter.

Methodology

This section is the heart of the proposal because it provides insight into your perspective as well as details on how you plan to carry out the project. How will you accomplish your objective(s)? What theories or concepts will guide the study? How do they or might they suggest the specific hypotheses or research questions? Where might you run into obstacles?

Explain the specifics of what you want present in your project (statistical data, comparisons of historical and recent data, the evolution of a paradigm, etc.). One way to do this is by developing a rough outline of the major topics and sub-topics that you will investigate.

Your timeline and a very rough scope (past – current – future) has been pre-determined.

A final note about good proposals

Quality writing is critical. The proposal should be clear, concise, and free of jargon. There should be no spelling or grammatical errors, and the proposal should be easy to read.

Start early and share ideas with peers! Incorporate feedback; gain ideas from reading other student work.

Criteria for Evaluating Research Papers (from *McKeachie's Teaching Tips*, 11th edition, 177)

A. Content

1. Introduction

- a. Is the topic novel and original?
- b. Does the author state the purpose, problem, or question to be considered?
- c. How does the author convince the reader that the paper is worth reading?

2. Body

- a. How are the statements made warranted? Is there evidence that data collected have been analyzed and literature reviewed? Are assumptions logical?
- b. Presentation of evidence
 1. Is contradictory evidence dealt with adequately?
 2. Are multiple sources considered?
 3. Is the evidence discussed relevant to the purpose stated?
 4. Is the argument internally consistent? In other words, does one point follow from another?
 5. Is the argument plausible?
 6. Are the methods chosen for testing the argument convincing?
- c. Suitability of paper's focus
 1. Is the problem chosen focused enough to be adequately covered in the space of the paper?
 2. Is the problem chosen too specific for the author's source of information?
- d. Background information
 1. Is enough information given to familiarize the reader with the problem?
 2. Is unimportant background material included?
- e. Is the presentation easy to follow and well organized?
- f. Does the author deal with the problem set up in the introduction?

3. Conclusion

- a. Does the author summarize the findings adequately?
- b. Is the conclusion directly related to the questions asked in the introduction?
- c. Does the author suggest areas where further work is needed?

B. Connections to Class

1. Evidence that the class materials have been read and understood
2. Application of lecture materials and assigned readings to the paper

C. Form

1. Spelling
2. Grammar
3. Appropriate use of words
4. Paragraph form: Are ideas presented in coherent order?
5. Citations: Are borrowed ideas and statements given credit? Is the form of citation understandable and concise?

Grade	Research Papers – Evaluation
4.0	<p>Exceptional work. Student employs a creative and comprehensive exploration of the research area and its societal impacts; offers cogent arguments and well thought out explanations supported by evidence; synthesizes scholarly material; explains “why” as well as “how” and “what.” Thoughtful and very clear. Citations have no significant errors and are scholarly in nature.</p> <p>Organization: Organization enhances the paper; the introduction invites the reader to begin. The paper is has a well-focused and has interesting thesis; there is a smooth transition among all elements (sentences, paragraphs, ideas). The conclusion goes beyond restating the obvious. The writing style is engaging and the paper has no significant grammatical or spelling errors.</p>
3.5	<p>Outstanding work. Student employs a creative exploration of the research area and its societal impacts but it could be more comprehensive; offers relatively good arguments and explanations; synthesizes scholarly material; explains “why” as well as “how” or “what.” Thoughtful and fairly clear. Citations have minor errors and are mostly scholarly in nature.</p> <p>Organization: This paper has a useful introduction and a focused thesis. Its unified and coherent paragraphs support the thesis; transitions are smooth. The conclusion is competent. The writing style is clear and the paper has no significant grammatical or spelling errors.</p>
3.0	<p>Average work. Student exploration of the research area and societal impacts is average; arguments and explanations are average with some evidence ; moderate synthesis of scholarly material; explains “how” or “what” but “why” is not convincing. Citations have minor errors and are mostly scholarly in nature.</p> <p>Organization: This paper has a general introduction and vague thesis; has some incoherent paragraphs that attempt to support the thesis. Transitions are not smooth; the conclusion is vague. The writing style is unclear and the paper has grammatical or spelling errors.</p>
2.5	<p>Below average work. Student exploration of the research area and societal impacts is average; arguments and explanations are unconvincing and unsupported by evidence; little synthesis of scholarly material; explains “how” or “what” but not “why.” Citations have major errors and are mostly popular in nature.</p> <p>Organization: Overall organization in inconsistent. This paper has a general introduction and vague thesis; has incoherent paragraphs that bear little relevance to the thesis. It is missing transitions; choppy. The conclusion is inadequate. The writing style is unclear and the paper has significant grammatical or spelling errors.</p>
2.0	<p>Fair work. Student exploration of the research area and societal impacts is below average; arguments and explanations are unconvincing; very little synthesis of scholarly material. Citations have major errors and are mostly popular in nature.</p> <p>Organization: The paper has no clear structure. There is no introduction or no thesis; incoherent paragraphs make the paper difficult to read. It is missing transitions and the conclusion is inadequate or non-existent. There are significant grammatical or spelling errors.</p>
1.5	<p>Failure. Student exploration of the research area and societal impacts is below average; arguments and explanations are unconvincing; no synthesis of scholarly material, merely summaries. No overall coherence. Citations have major errors and are mostly popular in nature or non-existent.</p> <p>Organization: The paper lacks coherence. It has no introduction or thesis, no transitions, no clear introduction-middle-conclusion. The writing style is unreadable, and the paper has significant grammatical or spelling errors.</p>